

Popular Walk Kansas program gears up for 2024

Eight week challenge focuses on physical activity, healthy eating

Two-thirds of chronic diseases – diabetes, heart disease, arthritis and others -- can be prevented by lifestyle changes.

So, each year about this time, Sharolyn Jackson gets pretty excited about a program that rallies thousands of Kansans and their friends to have a little fun and improve their mental and physical health.

Jackson is the state leader of K-State Research and Extension's popular [Walk Kansas program](#), a team-based challenge that encourages people to walk, jog, run, bike, swim or do whatever they need to do to live more healthfully. The program routinely draws more than 7,000 participants.

"Walk Kansas was founded on the principle that if teams of six people would meet the minimum guidelines for physical activity over eight weeks, they could collectively and virtually walk across the state of Kansas, which is 423 miles," Jackson said.

The U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention recommends 150 minutes of moderate to vigorous physical activity each week – or about 30 minutes a day, five days a week.

"Moderate activity can be walking or exercising or being active at a pace to where you can barely carry on a conversation, but not able to sing," Jackson said. "Vigorous activity is where you can maybe say a few words, but you might have to stop and catch your breath if you want to say a sentence."

The 2024 Walk Kansas program kicks off on March 31 and will run eight weeks through May 25. More information and registration is now [available online](#) . The cost per person is \$10; t-shirts can be purchased for a separate charge.

"It's a very adaptable program," Jackson said. "As a team, if you participate in Walk Kansas, you can choose between different challenges. Challenge One will take you down that 423 miles through the Eight Wonders of Kansas, and requires each team member to exercise 150 minutes per week.

"If the team decides they want to work a little harder, Challenge Two requires four hours of activity per week, per person. And Challenge Three is for those teams where team members will aim for six hours of activity per week, per person."

There is also a solo challenge for those who don't have a team, or just prefer to take on the challenge themselves. Participants do not have to live in Kansas to be on a team or to do the solo challenge.

In addition to tracking their minutes of activity – which are then translated into "miles" of activity – participants are asked to report the number of cups of fruits and vegetables and water they consume weekly. Participants are also encouraged to add in some type of strength exercise.

"We also offer tips and instruction through our weekly newsletters and the Walk Kansas website," Jackson said.

Jackson said organizers will offer a weekly webinar on healthy eating, focusing on the Mediterranean diet.

“Walk Kansas, holistically, really is a chronic disease prevention program, or a way to delay the onset of chronic disease,” Jackson said. “For those already with a chronic disease, they can learn ways to manage it better through physical activity and healthy eating.

“We often think about (diseases) that might be genetic, or it’s just your family history. But the reality is that two-thirds of chronic diseases can be prevented or delayed by these lifestyle changes.”

More information about Walk Kansas also is available at all the Twin Creeks Extension Offices.